ENGL 2201 Intermediate Creative Writing 1
Course Outline

Course Co-ordinator: Dr Kim Cheng Boey
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Fax: 02-4921 6933
Email: kimcheng.boey@newcastle.edu.au
Consultation hours: Wednesday 11am-1pm, Friday 11am – 1pm
Semester: Semester 1 - 2006
Unit Weighting: 10
Teaching Methods: Lecture, Seminar, Workshop

Course Overview

Brief Course Description
This course equips students with the essentials of three genres: poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction. Through a close study of texts and weekly writing exercises, students will learn how a good poem works, understand the crafting of short narratives and appreciate the dexterous blending of fact and fiction in creative nonfiction works. They will apply the creative tools they discover through close readings in the shaping of their own work.

Contact Hours
Seminar for 2 Hours per Week for the Full Term

Learning Materials/Texts
The Art of the Tale edited by Daniel Halpern
The Making of the Poem edited by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland
**Course Objectives**
Upon successful completion of this course, students will have
1. furthered their understanding of art of creative reading - the ability to identify a good text and use it as a creative model;
2. furthered their ability to analyse literary texts in a coherent way;
3. acquired a deeper knowledge of the different genres, literary tradition and forms;
4. learned more about the mechanics of a good poem, a compelling narrative and creative nonfiction;
5. learned to apply some of the literary techniques to their own work.

**Course Content**
This course provides literary training in three genres: poetry, narrative and creative nonfiction. Through a close reading of poems and the poetic beliefs of chosen poets, students will learn to appreciate the labour behind the well-made poem. They will understand the poetic choices in such things as diction and meter. In narrative, they will explore the strategies of short-story writers such as point of view, plot and characterization. They will see how these narrative strategies are also tangibly used in works of creative nonfiction. They will apply the critical terms they learn from analysing the poetry and prose texts in critiquing their own work and that of their fellow students.

At the same time, students acquire the critical tools necessary in assessing literary texts and their own creative work. Particular attention will be paid to
* poetic forms and devices;
* the form of the short story and narrative strategies;
* the major forms of creative nonfiction;
* the skills and techniques of major writers;
* discovering literary exemplars to inspire students.

**Assessment Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essays / Written Assignments</th>
<th>* Creative Work: 2500 words or equivalent (50%) – due 5 June</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essays / Written Assignments</td>
<td>* Short Creative Writing Exercise: 500 words or equivalent (15%) – due 10 April</td>
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<td>* Critical Essay: 1000 words (20%) – due 15 May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group/tutorial participation and contribution</td>
<td>* Class participation (5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>* Journal and book review: 500 words (10%) – due 5 June</td>
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**Assumed Knowledge**
20 units of ENGL or CMNS courses at 1000 level
Callaghan Campus Timetable
ENGL2201
INTERMEDIATE CREATIVE WRITING I
Enquiries: School of Humanities and Social Science
Semester 1 - 2006

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>11:00 - 13:00</td>
<td>[GP2-18]</td>
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<td>or</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>11:00 - 13:00</td>
<td>[MCG60C]</td>
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<td>or</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>9:00 - 11:00</td>
<td>[W243]</td>
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<td>or</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>11:00 - 13:00</td>
<td>[MC102]</td>
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<td>or</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>11:00 - 13:00</td>
<td>[MCG28C]</td>
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<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>17:00 - 19:00</td>
<td>[MC102]</td>
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Plagiarism

University policy prohibits students plagiarising any material under any circumstances. A student plagiarises if he or she presents the thoughts or works of another as one's own. Without limiting the generality of this definition, it may include:

- copying or paraphrasing material from any source without due acknowledgment;
- using another's ideas without due acknowledgment;
- working with others without permission and presenting the resulting work as though it was completed independently.

Plagiarism is not only related to written works, but also to material such as data, images, music, formulae, websites and computer programs.

Aiding another student to plagiarise is also a violation of the Plagiarism Policy and may invoke a penalty.

For further information on the University policy on plagiarism, please refer to the Policy on Student Academic Integrity at the following link -


The University has established a software plagiarism detection system called Turnitin. When you submit assessment items please be aware that for the purpose of assessing any assessment item the University may -

- Reproduce this assessment item and provide a copy to another member of the University; and/or
- Communicate a copy of this assessment item to a plagiarism checking service (which may then retain a copy of the item on its database for the purpose of future plagiarism checking).
- Submit the assessment item to other forms of plagiarism checking
Written Assessment Items

Students may be required to provide written assessment items in electronic form as well as hard copy.

Extension of Time for Assessment Items, Deferred Assessment and Special Consideration for Assessment Items or Formal Written Examinations

Students are required to submit assessment items by the due date, as advised in the Course Outline, unless the Course Coordinator approves an extension of time for submission of the item. University policy is that an assessment item submitted after the due date, without an approved extension, will be penalised.

Any student:

1. who is applying for an extension of time for submission of an assessment item on the basis of medical, compassionate, hardship/trauma or unavoidable commitment; or

2. whose attendance at or performance in an assessment item or formal written examination has been or will be affected by medical, compassionate, hardship/trauma or unavoidable commitment;

must report the circumstances, with supporting documentation, to the appropriate officer on the prescribed form.

Please go to the Policy and the on-line form for further information, particularly for information on the options available to you, at:


Changing your Enrolment

The last dates to withdraw without financial or academic penalty (called the HECS Census Dates) are:

For semester 1 courses: 31 March 2006

Students may withdraw from a course without academic penalty on or before the last day of semester and prior to the commencement of the formal exam period. Any withdrawal from a course after the last day of semester will result in a fail grade.

Students cannot enrol in a new course after the second week of semester/trimester, except under exceptional circumstances. Any application to add a course after the second week of semester/trimester must be on the appropriate form, and should be discussed with the School Office.

To change your enrolment online, please refer to

http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/enrolment/changingenrolment.html
Contact Details

Faculty Student Service Offices

The Faculty of Education and Arts
Room: GP1-22 (General Purpose Building)
Phone: 0249 215 314

The Dean of Students

Dr Jennifer Archer
Phone: 492 15806
Fax: 492 17151
resolutionprecinct@newcastle.edu.au

Various services are offered by the University Student Support Unit:

Alteration of this Course Outline

No change to this course outline will be permitted after the end of the second week of the term except in exceptional circumstances and with Head of School approval. Students will be notified in advance of any approved changes to this outline.

Web Address for Rules Governing Undergraduate Academic Awards

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR CHRONIC ILLNESS

The University is committed to providing a range of support services for students with a disability or chronic illness.

If you have a disability or chronic illness which you feel may impact on your studies, please feel free to discuss your support needs with your lecturer or course coordinator.

Disability Support may also be provided by the Student Support Service (Disability). Students must be registered to receive this type of support. To register please contact the Disability Liaison Officer on 49 21 5766, or via email at: student-disability@newcastle.edu.au

As some forms of support can take a few weeks to implement it is extremely important that you discuss your needs with your lecturer, course coordinator or Student Support Service staff at the beginning of each semester.

For more information related to confidentiality and documentation please visit the Student Support Service (Disability) website at:
www.newcastle.edu.au/services/disability
Online Tutorial Registration:
Students are required to enrol in the Lecture and a specific Tutorial time for this course via the Online Registration system:
β http://studinfo1.newcastle.edu.au/rego/stud_choose_login.cfm
Registrations close at the end of week 2 of semester.

Studentmail and Blackboard: www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/
This course uses Blackboard and studentmail to contact students, so you are advised to keep your email accounts within the quota to ensure you receive essential messages. To receive an expedited response to queries, post questions on the Blackboard discussion forum if there is one, or if emailing staff directly use the course code in the subject line of your email. Students are advised to check their studentmail and the course Blackboard site on a weekly basis.

Written Assignment Presentation and Submission Details
Students are required to submit assessment items by the due date. Late assignments will be subject to the penalties described below.

Hard copy submission:
β Type your assignments: All work must be typewritten in 11 or 12 point black font. Leave a wide margin for marker’s comments, use 1.5 or double spacing, and include page numbers.
β Word length: The word limit of all assessment items should be strictly followed – 10% above or below is acceptable, otherwise penalties may apply.
β Proof read your work because spelling, grammatical and referencing mistakes will be penalised.
β Staple the pages of your assignment together (do not use pins or paper clips).
β University coversheet: All assignments must be submitted with the University coversheet: www.newcastle.edu.au/policy/academic/general/assess_coversheet.pdf

Assignments are to be deposited in the relevant discipline assignment box:
ο Callaghan students: School of Humanities and Social Science Office, Level 1, McMullin Building, MC127
ο Ourimbah students: Room H01.43

Do not fax or email assignments: Only hard copies of assignments will be considered for assessment. Inability to physically submit a hard copy of an assignment by the deadline due to other commitments or distance from campus is an unacceptable excuse. Assignments mailed to Schools are accepted from the date posted.

Keep a copy of all assignments: All assignments are date-stamped upon receipt. However, it is the student’s responsibility to produce a copy of their work if the assignment goes astray after submission. Students are advised to keep updated back-ups in hard copy and on disk.

Online copy submission to Turnitin
In addition to hard copy submission, students are required to submit an electronic version of the following assignments to Turnitin via the course Blackboard website:

Creative Work: 2500 words or equivalent (50%) – due 5 June
Short Creative Writing Exercise: 500 words or equivalent (15%) – due 10 April
Critical Essay: 1000 words (20%) – due 15 May

Prior to final submission, all students have the opportunity to submit one draft of their assignment to Turnitin to self-check their referencing.
Assignments will not be marked until both hard copy and online versions have been submitted. Marks may be deducted for late submission of either version.

**Penalties for Late Assignments**
Assignments submitted after the due date, without an approved extension of time will be penalised by the **reduction of 5% of the possible maximum mark** for the assessment item for each day or part day that the item is late. Weekends count as one day in determining the penalty. Assessment items submitted **more than ten days** after the due date will be awarded **zero marks**.

**Special Consideration/Extension of Time Applications**
Students wishing to apply for Special Consideration or Extension of Time should obtain the appropriate form from the Student HUBS.

**No Assignment Re-submission**
Students who have failed an assignment are not permitted to revise and resubmit it in this course. However, students are always welcome to contact their Tutor, Lecturer or Course Coordinator to make a consultation time to receive individual feedback on their assignments.

**Remarks**
Students can request to have their work re-marked by the Course Coordinator or Discipline Convenor (or their delegate); three outcomes are possible: the same grade, a lower grade, or a higher grade being awarded. Students may also appeal against their final result for a course. Please consult the University policy at:


**Return of Assignments**
Where possible, assignments will be marked within 3 weeks and returned to students in class. At the end of semester, students can collect assignments from the Student HUBS during office hours.

**Preferred Referencing Style**
In this course, it is recommended that you use the MLA referencing system for referencing sources of information used in assignments. Inadequate or incorrect reference to the work of others may be viewed as plagiarism and result in reduced marks or failure.

An in-text citation names the author of the source and the page number in parentheses. At the end of the paper, a list of references provides publication information about the source; the list is alphabetised by authors' last names (or by titles for works without authors). Further information on referencing and general study skills can be obtained from:

Infoskills:


**Student Representatives**
We are very interested in your feedback and suggestions for improvement. Student Representatives are the channel of communication between students and the School Board. Contact details of Student Representatives can be found on the School website.

**Student Communication**
Students should discuss any course related matters with their Tutor, Lecturer, or Course Coordinator in the first instance and then the relevant Discipline or Program
Convenor. If this proves unsatisfactory, they should then contact the Head of School if required. Contact details can be found on the School website.

**Essential Online Information for Students**
Information on Class and Exam Timetables, Tutorial Online Registration, Learning Support, Campus Maps, Careers information, Counselling, the Health Service and a range of free Student Support Services can be found at:


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<tr>
<th>Grading guide</th>
<th>Fail (FF)</th>
<th>Pass (P)</th>
<th>Credit (C)</th>
<th>Distinction (D)</th>
<th>High Distinction (HD)</th>
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<td>49% or less</td>
<td>An unacceptable effort, including non-completion. The student has not understood the basic principles of the subject matter and/or has been unable to express their understanding in a comprehensible way. Deficient in terms of answering the question, research, referencing and correct presentation (spelling, grammar etc). May include extensive plagiarism.</td>
<td>The work demonstrates a reasonable attempt to answer the question, shows some grasp of the basic principles of the subject matter and a basic knowledge of the required readings, is comprehensible, accurate and adequately referenced.</td>
<td>The work demonstrates a clear understanding of the question, a capacity to integrate research into the discussion, and a critical appreciation of a range of different theoretical perspectives. A deficiency in any of the above may be compensated by evidence of independent thought. The work is coherent and accurate.</td>
<td>Evidence of substantial additional reading and/or research, and evidence of the ability to generalise from the theoretical content to develop an argument in an informed and original manner. The work is well organised, clearly expressed and shows a capacity for critical analysis.</td>
<td>All of the above, plus a thorough understanding of the subject matter based on substantial additional reading and/or research. The work shows a high level of independent thought, presents informed and insightful discussion of the topic, particularly the theoretical issues involved, and demonstrates a well-developed capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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# Course Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Week beginning</th>
<th>Lecture Topic &amp; Assessment at a Glance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>February 20</td>
<td>The Art of the Real</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>February 27</td>
<td>The Contemporary Short Story. <strong>Text:</strong> Susan Sontag’s “Unguided Tour”</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>The Poetry of Place/ The Villanelle. <strong>Texts:</strong> Charles Wright’s “Looking West from Laguna Beach at Night,” Robert Hass’ “Meditation at Lagunitas”</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Placing the Story 2 – Displacement. <strong>Texts:</strong> Eudora Welty’s “No Place For You, My Love,” Albert Camus’ “The Adulterous Woman”</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>Creative Nonfiction 1 – The Personal Essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>Point of View 1 – The First Person. <strong>Texts:</strong> Edna O’Brien’s “Sister Imelda,” Truman Capote’s “Children on Their Birthdays.” <strong>Short Writing Exercise due April 10 (15%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>Point of View – the third person. <strong>Texts:</strong> Doctorow’s “The Hunter,” Leon Rooker’s “In the Garden”</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>May 22</td>
<td>Point of View – the second person. <strong>Texts:</strong> Russell Banks’ “The Child Screams and Looks Back at You,” Margaret Atwood’s “Hair Jewellery”</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>May 29</td>
<td>The Art of Revision</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>June 5</td>
<td>Creative Writing Portfolio and journal(with review) to be handed in before 5pm, June 5</td>
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**Note:**
* The first 45 minutes of the class will be devoted to a lecture and discussion on the topic/readings of the week. This is followed by a 10-minute creative writing exercise and a five-minute break. The second hour is for workshopping.
Any work to be critiqued should be circulated a week before being workshopped. It should be read at home and a brief critique prepared for the workshop. This allows more discussion time.

The golden rule to be observed in the sessions is respect, for the tutor and for fellow writing students. Respect and humility are essential in the writing life. Criticism should be constructive and directed at the text, not the author. The poem or story should be evaluated objectively, paying close attention to the craft.

Participation is assessed by the degree of positive contribution to class discussions. Students can get feedback on their participation during the semester.

The assessment items are a Creative Writing portfolio (50%), a critical essay (20%), a short creative writing assignment (15%) and a journal (10%). For the Creative Writing portfolio and short assignment, you may use the creative writing suggestions in the weekly topics below or develop your work independently. Prose can be a single story or two or three short stories totalling 2500 words. For poetry, the number may range from 10-15 poems, depending on the length of the poems and the quality. For the 1000 word critical essay, you must select one of the critical questions relating to the topics from the course. The 500 word journal should include observations about writing and writers, drafts for projects, and a review of a contemporary work. You should be working on your journal through the semester, making it a place where you deposit images, ideas, and thoughts about writers and writing.

All work must be typed, double-spaced for prose, one-and-half for poetry. All pieces should bear a title, name and date.

The weekly discussion topics are divided into critical and creative sections. The critical section focuses on literary analysis and appreciation of the stories and poems. You will acquire critical tools and concepts such as genre, form, literary devices etc and apply them to the texts being read. The creative section consists of writing exercises related to the themes, requiring you to look closely at the skills and techniques covered in the readings.

**Week 1 - The Art of the Real**

A common advice given by writers in workshops is to write about the known, the little things that we do and encounter each day. Oscar Wilde remarks that “the miracle of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” Writers like William Carlos Williams practice the art of the quotidian. In ENGL 1201 we witnessed how Williams transformed a red wheelbarrow into an object as worthy of attention as the greatest art object. Here is another lyric seizing on what seems to be an insignificant moment:

To a Poor Old Woman

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her
You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

Comforted
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
They taste good to her

What is the poem about? Is it about the great abstracts like love and death? What kind of language is being used? What does it reveal about Williams’ ideas and ideals about poetry? Raymond Carver too celebrates the miracle of the quotidian. “Happiness” is a poem that picks out a routine event and turns it into a moment of poetic beauty:

So early it’s still almost dark out.
I’m near the window with coffee,
and the usual early morning stuff
that passes for thought.
When I see the boy and his friend
walking up the road
to deliver the newspaper.
They wear caps and sweaters,
and one boy has a bag over his shoulder.
They are so happy
they aren’t saying anything, these boys.
I think if they could, they would take
each other’s arm.
It’s early in the morning,
and they are doing this thing together.
They come on, slowly.
The sky is taking on light,
though the moon still hangs pale over the water.
Such beauty that for a minute
death and ambition, even love,
doesn’t enter into this.
Happiness. It comes on
unexpectedly. And goes beyond, really,
any early morning talk about it.

Carver has taken something very routine, a scene that he has probably seen day after day, and turned it into a significant moment of peace and happiness. The language is simple, plain, and intimate. There are no colourful metaphors, just a quiet description reflecting the beauty of the moment. The poem then dismisses its own effort to approximate the sense of happiness in an everyday event.

The poem, or any form of writing, is about paying attention, being alive to beauty of the everyday, the connections between people and things. Even an onion can be a poetic subject. Pablo Neruda’s “Ode to the Onion” ends:

You make us cry without hurting us,
I have praised everything that exists,
But to me onion, you are
More beautiful than a bird
Of dazzling feathers,
You are to my eyes
A heavenly globe, a platinum goblet,
An unmoving dance
Of the snowy anemone
And the fragrance of the earth lives
In your crystalline nature.

Of course writing is also about finding the answers to the great questions, the unknowns of life, death, love and evil. But it has to first of all engage with what is found here, the real, the things we can see, touch, hear and feel, to make us perceive them in a new light. Without poems and stories there to revitalise our senses, we would lose sight of our humanity and the wonder of the everyday. Williams could not have put it better:

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
    yet men die miserably every day

for lack of what is found there.

Critical
Ezra Pound’s injunction to writers is to “Make it New.” Select three poems from The Making of a Poem or other anthologies and show how each poem celebrates the seemingly insignificant. Pay close attention to the diction, the rhythm, the presence or absence of metaphors.

Creative
1. When asked by his disciple about the way to enlightenment, a Zen Master says: “The Way is your daily life.” There are art objects, poems to be found all around us. There is poetry in the things we do daily: waking, washing, eating, walking, sleeping etc. Richard Jones’ “White Towels” turns laundry into a poem:

   I have been studying the difference
   Between solitude and loneliness,
   Telling the story of my life
   To the clean white towels taken warm from the dryer.
   I carry them through the house
   As though they were my children
   Asleep in my arms.

Take a routine task and turn it into a poem.

2. Take a walk alone, in the bush, the suburb or the city. Keep your eyes and mind open. What do you see, hear, feel? Is there somebody on the street doing something striking, like reading Proust at a bus-stop? Do you hear anything or silence in the bush? Has the legion of lawnmowers started in the suburb? Walk, pause, watch, listen. Be there, when the poem appears.
Week 2 - The Contemporary Short Story

Critical
1. Since Chekhov the conventional pattern of the short story exposition or beginning, development or middle, climax and denouement or ending is increasingly subverted. Contemporary fiction often does away with the conventional narrative plot and structure. Instead other elements like mood and ambiguity may be more important than plot. Read Susan Sontag’s “Unguided Tour.” It is a highly experimental story that flouts conventional narrative expectations about plot, character, time and space. What is it about and how does the narrative embody the themes?
2. Compare Sontag’s “Unguided Tour” with William Maxwell’s “Pilgrimage.” The two stories are about travel and travellers. How do the stories differ in the treatment of the travel theme? Examine the differences in narrative structure and development.

Creative
1. Write a story about travel and travelling. Explore the sense of place, the mood, the colours, the voices, smells etc. You may use Sontag or Maxwell as a model.
2. Write a story in strict chronological order. Now cut the story up into separate scenes and shuffle them. Arrange them in different sequences and permutations. See if you can retell the story in a discontinuous and fragmentary way, switching between scenes and points of view.

Week 3 Placing the Story

Place and places are very important in giving a sense of reality to your stories. They ground your plot and characters, give them the atmosphere they need to become alive. Getting the place right means not just having a backdrop for your story; it can also provide the key to the story. In Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, the African jungle is not only the place where the protagonist makes vital discoveries about himself and the nature of human civilisation, but it is also the theme, the unknown and unknowable at the heart of the story.

Critical
1. Discuss the use of place in Albert Camus’ “The Adulterous Woman” or Flannery O'Connor’s “The Artificial Nigger.” Explore how the characters respond and relate to the surroundings and how the locations reflect the concerns of the stories.
2. What is T. Coraghessan Boyle’s “Greasy Lake” about? How does the use of place bring out the themes? You may want to compare the use of place in Boyle’s story with Robert Coover’s “Quenby and Ola, Swede and Carl” or Truman Capote’s “Children On Their Birthdays.”

Creative
1. Write a story in which a character departs a familiar setting for an alien or unfamiliar place, as happens in “The Artificial Nigger.” Track the change in perception, mood and movement of the character.
2. Write about a place from the point of view of three characters. It could be a library, a bookstore, a train station. It could be an event that involves the three characters, but each of them should have a different impression of the place and event, a different memory of the place.
Week 4 – The Poetry of Place

Poets have always written about places. In Irish poetry, there is a poetic tradition called dinnseanchas, poems tracing the origins of place names and the capturing the genius loci or the spirit of place. Poets dig into places for poems, places where they experience insight and epiphanies. William Wordsworth’s autobiographical long poem “The Prelude” is tied to places, the events and thoughts which have shaped his life each happen in a particular place. Poets like Seamus Heaney and Les Murray trace their beginnings as poets to the places in childhood. Places enable them to map their journeys, to make real the poetic and spiritual revelations experienced on the journey.

Critical
1. What do the descriptions of place suggest about the attitude towards life in Charles Wright’s “Looking West from Laguna Beach at Night”? What is the tone of the poem? How does the tone relate to the theme?
2. Read Robert Hass’ “Meditation at Lagunitas.” What is the poem about? Compare it with Charles Wright’s “Looking West from Laguna Beach at Night.” What are the differences in attitudes towards life? How does the portrayal of place in each poem reveal this?

Creative
1. Write a poem about a place where you had an intense experience, something like a spiritual revelation or epiphany. Use vivid imagery, metaphors and similes, to evoke the place. Pay attention to how the rhythm affects the tone and mood of your poem.
2. Write a verse letter to a friend about the place where you live. Use place names like Wright and Hass, zoom in on the details, the faces, the landscape and move back for distant shots. Relate the landscape, the scenes to your feelings and thoughts.
3. Read John Hollander’s villanelle “By the Sound.” Write a villanelle about a place.

Week 5 Displacement

In fiction, characters are often put on a journey, the story tracing their movements across landscapes which can be hostile and intimidating, or beautiful and peaceful. The journey provides the plot scaffolding, the itinerary for your story, and allows your characters to develop through the trials and tribulations they experience on the road. Like the quest heroes in myths and legends, they battle others and themselves and become victorious or vanquished. In either case, they achieve a deeper understanding of life, of themselves. Modernist and contemporary writers often use the journey to depict the existential displacement that has become an endemic feeling in the modern and postmodernist world. Characters like those in Jack Kerouac’s On the Road are rootless, unable to come home.

Critical
1. Read Eudora Welty’s “No Place For You, My Love” and Susan Sontag’s “Unguided Tour.” Do you agree that the characters in both stories suffer from a sense of displacement, a sense of not belonging? Compare how the two writers use the landscape to evoke the sense of uprootedness.
2. Read Camus’ “The Adulterous Woman” and Welty’s “No Place For You, My Love.” Both stories are about journeys of self-discovery. Compare the two journeys and how they enact the themes.
Creative
1. Write a story about a character who goes on a journey for a known reason, like Camus’ character in “The Adulterous Woman” but ends up on an interior journey of self-discovery. Use the landscape to mirror the transformation of the character’s consciousness.
2. Place a character in an unfamiliar and alien setting. Focus on the sense of unease and anxiety, and how the character responds, whether he or she gradually learns to embrace the unknown. Show how the change takes place, rather than tell.

Week 6 – The Pastoral

The pastoral is a literary convention that celebrates the virtues of rural living. It idealises the lives of the shepherds; the simplicity and joy of living in harmony with nature resembles a kind of prelapsarian existence. Classical masters of the pastoral form include Virgil and Theocritus. The pastoral experienced a revival in the Elizabethan age, in the poems of Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe and others. In Shakespeare’s plays, we find characters fleeing from the town to the country. But later poets undermine the pastoral conventions with more realistic portrayal of country living – George Crabbe exposes the harsh realities in “The Village.” Arcadia, with its promise of peace and content, remains a nostalgic dream of the city-dweller.

Critical
1. How do Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,” Andrew Marvell’s “The Garden,” and William Wordsworth’s “To My Sister” celebrate the virtues of rural life? Which is the most convincing portrayal of rural living?

Creative
1. Write a pastoral poem about the virtues of living in the outback or the bush.
2. Write a modern pastoral which refer to and at the same time undermine the conventional pastoral. You can also write a poem lauding urban living over a life in the country.

Week 7 – Creative Nonfiction: the Memoir

In recent years creative nonfiction has emerged as a literary genre that is drawing practitioners from all fields of writing. It is a very broad label that covers very diverse subgenres: memoir, biography, the personal essay, meditation, nature writing, literary journalism, literary science etc. A creative nonfiction piece may straddle a few of these genres and be very hard to pin down. The requirement is that the account is factual and based on personal experience or investigation. One may, however, detect elements of fiction in it: the plotted narrative, the characterisation, dialogue and scene-crafting. Indeed we know that facts have been reshuffled and rearranged so that the work reads as compellingly and coherently as good fiction. There are also lyric touches, reflective imagery and poetic rhythms interrupting the narrative stride.

The memoir is perhaps the most popular form of creative nonfiction. A memoir covers a period in a person’s life, not the entire span, as the autobiography does. A memoir can be about a few crucial years, a few months, a few days, or even just one day. It also focuses on certain experiences bearing on a certain theme. It could record a lone voyage around the world, an illness, quest of identity, about becoming a writer etc. The memoir employs fictional devices to tell its story. Events
can be edited and recast in the process of finding the shape and meaning for the experiences. The overlap with fiction notwithstanding, what characterises the memoir is the emotional honesty, the belief that this is what happened.

**Critical**

1. Read the personal essay and see how it resembles a short story. What is the theme(s) of the essay? How does the essay convey this? Explore the rhythm, imagery, syntax etc.

**Creative**

1. Describe the place you grew up in. Visualise the streets, the shops, the markets, the surrounding hills etc. You may want to draw a map of it, and list the significant landmarks, the places that were important to you, like the library, the bookstore etc. Is there any event or incident that happened in any of these places, an event that has remained etched in your mind or has suddenly surfaced? Have you managed to convey a sense of the place and time? Are your descriptions vivid enough to engage all the senses, sight, smell, sound, touch? Read it as a reader. Can you feel the writing transport you there?
2. What is the most important event that has shaped you into who you are? Avoid launching into it directly. Take the time to set the scenes, to see connective threads, to weave reflective elements into the narrative.
3. Write an essay about a member of your family. Centre your essay on a particular memory, or a sequence or connected memories. Sift through the family album and pick a few snapshots. Describe the person from these portraits.

**Week 8 – The First-Person Narrative Point of View**

**Critical**

1a. List the advantages in the use of the first-person point of view.
1b. Now list the limitations of the first-person point of view.
1c. Pick any first-person narrative piece from The Art of the Tale and illustrate the advantages of the first person. Are there any setbacks in deploying the first-person? How does the author counter these?

2. Read Edna O'Brien's “Sister Imelda.” What is the story about? What if the story had been written in the third person? How would it alter the story?
3. Now read Truman Capote's “Children on Their Birthdays.” The story uses the first person plural “We.” How does this contribute to the theme of the story? What if it had been written from a third person plural “They” point of view?

**Creative**

1. Write a story about childhood from the first-person point of view. You can combine the first person singular “I” and plural “We.” Pay attention to the voice of the child and also whether there is an adult perspective there.
2. Write a story about an event from three characters’ point of view, using three first person points of view.
Week 9 – The Dramatic Monologue

Critical
1. In a dramatic monologue, the poet assumes a persona, step into the life of another person and speaks in his or her voice. The dramatic monologue also establishes the dramatic context, the physical setting and historical moment. What is the dramatic context in Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and Cavafy’s “Ithaka”? What can we infer about the speaker in each poem? Pay close attention to the voice and tone. How does each poem build up the voice and character of the speaker?
2. The dramatic monologue involves putting on a mask, a voice, but it also reveals the anxiety about the self. Often it is a quest for the self through something that is the opposite of the self. Discuss with reference to T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”

Creative
1. Write a dramatic monologue, assuming the voice of a well known figure from history, for example, Captain Cook or other explorers. Immerse yourself in the character and at the same time let your own obsession, thoughts loose.
2. Attempt a dramatic monologue using one of these: a bored housewife, a school drop-out, a migrant, an exile, a refugee, a dying writer, a saint.

Week 10 – The Third-Person Narrative Point of View

The third person involves the use of “he,” “she” or “they.” There are a few varieties of the third person. There is the third person omniscient in which the writer assumes a God-like position, knowing everything about the characters and the events. There is the third person limited point of view, in which the reader sees things mostly through the eyes of one character. This can range from objective, when the reader observes the character without entering his or her mind, to the subjective, when the reader has access to the character’s emotions and thought.

Critical
1. Compare the use of the third-person point of view in Doctorow’s “The Hunter” with that in Leon Rooke’s “In the Garden”? The two stories have a troubled female protagonist. Explore how the narrative point of view in each story depicts the character and the theme.
2. Read James Purdy’s “Eventide.” What kind of point of view is this? How does this enhance the poignancy of the story?

Creative
1. Write about two characters who are attracted to each other, as in “Two Gentle People,” using a third person objective point of view. Now rewrite it from a third person subjective. Which works better for you?
2. Write about a character undergoing a crisis (marriage breakdown, death of loved one, loss of job etc) from a third person subjective point of view. Try rewriting from the third person objective or mix the subjective and objective.
Week 11 – The Poetry of the Self

All writing is in some sense autobiographical. We write from the centre of ourselves, our experiences, our lives. The term “confessional poetry” was coined to describe the age of Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath but their poetry is far from being simply confessional. There is a lot of tinkering with fact, rearranging and shaping the experiences. It is too easy to bare our hearts, to pour out our emotions and thoughts in writing. The challenge is to find a coherent form for them, to turn experience into art. Sylvia Plath says of her art:

I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathize with these cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind.

Critical

1. Read Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “Carrion Comfort,” Sylvia Path’s “Daddy” and “Lady Lazarus,” and Robert Lowell’s “Waking in the Blue.” Explore how each poet wrestles with the tormented self, and turns it into coherent art, not plain confession.

Creative

1. Write a poem about a crisis, a painful moment or period in your life. Stay with it, even though it is hard. Wait for the images, the metaphors that will carry the weight of the emotions. See if you can find a form for it.

2. Dig up photographs of somebody with whom you had a difficult relationship. Address the person. Describe the photograph/s and also what is beyond the frame.

Week 12 – The Second-Person Narrative Point of View

Critical

1. List the advantages and disadvantages of the second person narrative point of view. Read Russell Banks’ “The Child Screams and Looks Back at You” or Margaret Atwood’s “Hair Jewellery” and note where the second person narrative point of view occurs. Why does Banks or Atwood go into the second person at these junctures? Is it effective?

Creative

1. Write about a painful or intense experience using a second person point of view.
2. Review the stories you have written so far. Is there any story that would benefit with an insertion of the second person, as in Atwood’s or Banks’ stories?
Week 13 - The Art of Revision

Anton Chekhov gave some advice about revising a story: first, he said, throw out the first three pages. As a young writer I figured that if anybody knew about short stories, it was Chekhov, so I tried taking his advice. I really hoped he was wrong, but of course he was right. It depends on the length of the story, naturally; if it’s very short, you can only throw out the first three paragraphs. But there are few first drafts to which Chekhov’s Razor doesn’t apply. Starting a story, we all tend to circle around, explain a lot of stuff, set things up that don’t need to be set up. Then we find our way and get going, and the story begins ... very often just about on page. — Ursula LeGuin

Kerouac may have reeled off On the Road in three weeks on a continuous typewriter scroll, and Faulkner may have sped through a story in a single nightshift, but in reality most writers labour for years on the work. Drafts and furious revisions, that is the test of a writer.

Revision is an intensive process. Horace, when he wrote the Ars Poetica, recommended that poets keep their poems home for ten years. When Pope wrote "An Essay on Criticism" seventeen hundred years after Horace, he cut the waiting time in half, suggesting that poets keep their poems for five years before publication. Hemingway is known to have done thirty drafts for a story. Gaps have to be filled in, but more often Ursula LeGuin’s update of Chekhov is right. The wastepaper basket, as another writer remarks, is the writer’s best friend. We generally write a lot more than necessary to get to the point where we are in a better position to see better. In another context, the jazz trumpeter Miles Davis says: “I always listen for what I can leave out.” The goal of revision is get the chords right and not have a superfluous note in the composition.

When we write, the writer comes to the fore and the critic takes a back seat. But when it comes to revision, it is time to let the critic take over the controls. This transition is not easy and sometimes you have to keep the two balanced, reading and writing. You may also have to leave the work for a while, read around, and come back to it with senses refreshed. You are then likely to see and hear better. Carver reveals: “Maybe I revise because it gradually takes me into he heart of what the story is about. I have to keep trying to see if I can find that out. It’s a process more than a fixed position.”

Checklist

Revision or rewriting entails a mobile vision – you should step back from your work and scan it as a whole and at the same time be able to zoom in to scrutinise the parts. Let the reader-critic in you take over and test-read it to check the coherence and ensure that every word counts. Flannery O’Connor says: “A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is.”

Here is a checklist for revision:
* What is the story about? What is the central defining moment of the story? Is it a moment of conflict, confrontation, knowledge? Do the sequences, the parts add and lead up to this? Is there enough causality, motivation, suspense to move the story and the reader forward?
* Has the central moment and scene been well sustained, explored and linked to the resolution? Is the resolution too forced or unsatisfactory?
* Are there irrelevant scenes?
* Have you repeated anything that doesn’t need recapitulation?
* Is there enough description? Or is there so much of it that the narrative is too ponderously slow?
* Is the writing too laboured, too self-conscious?
* Have you observed the golden rule-show and not tell? Inevitably there is summarizing, straightforward telling but this should be kept to a minimum and be done in an interesting way.
* Is there anything that is vague or general?
* Scan the sentences, the paragraphs. Are they too flat, overlong, clumsy or monotonous?
* Is there any passage that is overwritten or over-embellished? Samuel Johnson counsels: “Read over your compositions and, when you meet a passage that you think is particularly fine, strike it out.”
* Have you glossed over or hurried through a scene which could be important?
* Go over all the fundamentals – plot, structure, character development, location, point of view, and test if they have been well worked.
* Check the choice of words. Check the sentences, then the paragraphs. Do they flow?
* Get rid of clichés, unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.
* Tighten up the dialogue. Get rid of unnecessary speech markers like “he says,” if it is clear who is talking.
* Check the punctuations. Refer to the MLA Handbook for writers if you are unsure about punctuations like semi-colons.